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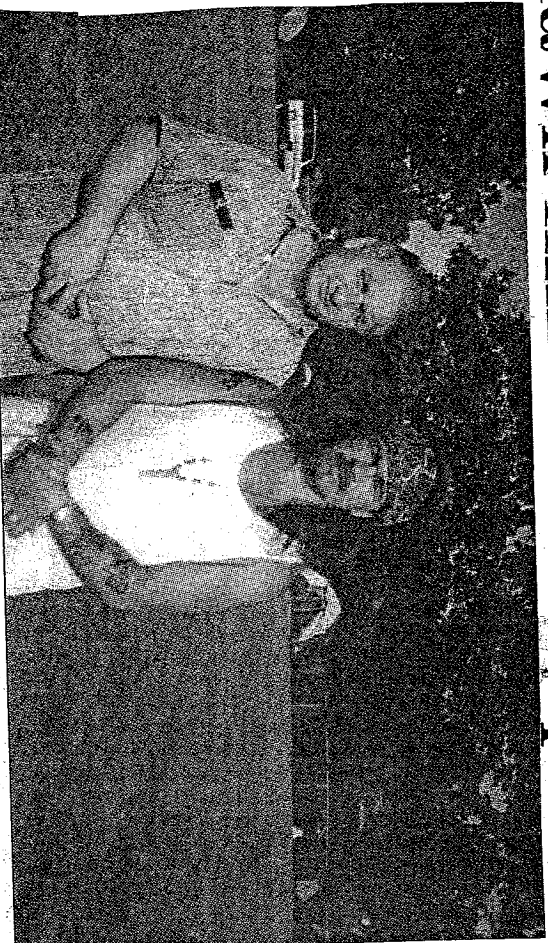
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ARTS & CULTURE

# Mohawk filmmaker captures Elders' stories



**BEATON, RIGHT, PICTURED WITH MOHAWK SPIRITUAL LEADER TOM PORTER**  
By Colleen Simard  
The First Perspective

Filmmaker Danny Beaton is driven by one guiding force: to tell the Elders' stories.

When recently informed that one of his films, *Mohawk Wisdom Keepers*, will be aired on the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network this fall, he was pleased that his efforts have begun to pay off.

Beaton says that the significant messages of Elders need to be heard—and that their knowledge is gradually regaining the respect and stature that it lost in the last few decades.

"I wanted to bring attention to the sacredness of the earth, and the importance of native values and culture," says Beaton. "I just thought the best way to reach the people would be to film the Elders, and get it on TV."

Beaton says he started making films 12 years ago, after he reached a turning point in his life to stay sober and drug-free. Since then he has traveled the red road, immersing himself in traditional Aboriginal spirituality and touring extensively throughout the years, meeting many renowned Elders across North America.

As part of the Traditional Circle of Elders & Youth group, his filmmaking was a natural progression from being the organization's official photographer.

*Mohawk Wisdom Keepers* is a documentary that brings forward the concerns and wisdom of five well-known Mohawk Elders. It contains various messages about the family unit, the stories of the past, and knowledge required to carry on into the future.

While the filmmaker says he is sometimes faced with people who oppose his message, he continues to follow his own vision.

"Western culture has a hard time

dealing with the truth," says Beaton. "Our ways are the truth."

And he says the approval of many Elders has given him the strength to persevere. Beaton recounts when traditional Elder Robert John Napp recently offered his support.

"He said 'If you can document the things that I feel and things that our ancestors cared about, if you can document this for my children, and they can see all this, I'll love you,'" says Beaton. "He's amazing, he has so much knowledge and so much love."

Napp, an Elder who has worked within the California prison system and with L.A. gang members, will offer his teachings and knowledge in Beaton's upcoming fifth film.

Beaton feels all natives across North America will find relevance in the insight of the Elders.

"A lot of native peoples have forgotten where their strength is—in honouring mother earth and protecting mother earth," he said.

Beaton notes that the traditional teachings of the Elders are not only for benefit the Aboriginal community, but the non-Aboriginal as well.

"We feel that a lot of non-natives are lost, and they're destroying the earth," says Beaton. "A lot of non-natives don't have spiritual and earth values...the earth is being polluted, the water, the rivers, the ocean. The earth itself is being raped, still. The most important things, they destroy."

Beaton laughs when I ask him if he is an environmentalist or an activist.

"I think natives are environmentalists, when they have their traditional culture," says Beaton. "The Elders say that in order for us to stay healthy, we have to give thanks. We can't be disconnected, we have to stay connected...the weather, animals, sounds. All these things are who we are."